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Sen. Hardiman to speak at forum about race and regional cooperation in southeast Michigan

LANSING – State Sen. Bill Hardiman, R-Kentwood, will speak Friday at a symposium focused on exploring the affect of race on regional-cooperation efforts in southeast Michigan. The symposium, “Dealing with Race: The Quest for Regional Cooperation,” is being co-hosted by New Detroit Inc. and the Woodrow Wilson Center of Washington, DC at the Ritz-Carlton in Dearborn.

Hardiman was invited to participate in a panel discussion at the event because of his diverse background in government, economic development and regional organizing. The only African American Republican state lawmaker in Michigan, Hardiman represents the sprawling 29th Senate District that includes the core city of Grand Rapids, first-ring suburban cities and townships, and rural governmental units.

Prior to his service in the Legislature, Hardiman served as mayor of the City of Kentwood, one of the fastest growing and most diverse suburban cities in Michigan. He also served on the Board of Directors for The Right Place Inc., a regional economic development organization and the Grand Valley Metropolitan Council of governments.

The senator will join Peter Karmanos, chairman and CEO of Compuware Corp., Anika Goss-Foster, of the Detroit Local Initiatives Support Corporation, and Jim Townsend, executive director of the Tourism Economic Development Council, in a panel discussion of the symposium’s keynote address.

“As an elected local and state official, I have seen first-hand the challenges relating to race and regional cooperation,” noted Hardiman. “In order for Michigan to grow and prosper in a global economy, we must learn to take the politics, prejudices, and personality differences out of regional cooperation efforts and start working together to do what’s best for the greater good of our state.”

Hardiman continued, “In many ways, the Grand Rapids area is a model for regional cooperation with a history of success with public and private partnerships, but the racial divide is still very prevalent in our community despite these efforts.”

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The keynote address will be delivered by June Manning Thomas, a Michigan State University urban and regional planning professor. She is expected to talk about the relationship between racism and economic and social growth as well as how racial disparities affect the prosperity of the region.

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